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Award Number: DAMD17-02-1-0536

TITLE: Discovery of Cyclic Peptide Estrogens and Antiestrogens

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REPORT DATE: May 2005

TYPE OF REPORT: Annual Summary

PREPARED FOR: U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command

Fort Detrick, Maryland 21702-5012

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: Approved for Public Release;

Distribution Unlimited

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20051024 148

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved OMB No. 074-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)

2. REPORT DATE
May 2005

3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED

| Annual Summary (22 Apr 02 - 21 Apr 05)

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE

Discovery of Cyclic Peptide Estrogens and Antiestrogens

5. FUNDING NUMBERS
DAMD17-02-1-0536

6. AUTHOR(S)

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U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command Fort Detrick, Maryland 21702-5012

10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER

11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Approved for Public Release; Distribution Unlimited

12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE

13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 Words)

This predoctoral fellowship application was initiated by Mr. Dan Clark and recently continued by Ms. Sonalee Athavankar. The objective has been to analyze biological pathways involved in breast cancer proliferation and study small molecules with the potential to modulate these pathways. We have created whole cell assays useful for studies of protein tyrosine kinase enzymes, which comprise a major class of drug targets implicated in a subset of breast cancers. We used these assays to study inhibitors of these enzymes in recombinant yeast cells engineered to be permeable to anticancer agents. We have also used recombinant yeast to identify and characterize protein tyrosine kinases isolated from human cDNA libraries. Current efforts are focused on the covalent modification in living cells of proteins involved in breast cancer proliferation.

14. SUBJECT TERMS Estrogen receptors, wh	nole-cell assays, chemi	cal synthesis	15. NUMBER OF PAGES 12
			16. PRICE CODE
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT
Unclassified	Unclassified	Unclassified	Unlimited

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Research Summary

Specific protein-protein interactions are critical for cellular survival. Small molecules that modulate these interactions can function as drugs to promote or prevent human disease. This predoctoral research has focused on the analysis, identification, and modulation of protein-protein interactions involved in the proliferation of breast cancer.

We initially tested the hypothesis that combinatorial chemical libraries of cyclic peptides expressed in yeast using the split-intein mediated circular ligation of peptides and proteins (SICLOPPS) genetic system would yield potent, stable, and cell-permeable modulators of estrogen receptor (ER)-mediated gene expression. These compounds were designed based on segetalin natural products, which are cyclic peptides that exhibit estrogenic activity in animals. Promising compounds were proposed to be evaluated in whole-cell assays as potential non-steroidal hormonal regulators of breast cancer. However, we found that the SICLOPPS system did not function in recombinant yeast as hoped, and this approach was abandoned.

Another more successful project involved the reconstitution of protein-protein interactions initiated by protein tyrosine kinase (PTK) enzymes in recombinant yeast. These enzymes catalyze the transfer of the gamma phosphoryl group of ATP to specific tyrosine residues of target proteins, and initiate protein-protein interactions involved in cellular signaling that are critical for numerous cellular functions. 5,6 Aberrant PTK activity is involved in numerous human diseases including breast cancer. 6,7 To study these enzymes, we published the construction of a yeast

tribrid system expressing a potentially universal PTK substrate as a tool for the evaluation of PTKs involved in disease. We also published a manuscript describing a modification this system to identify chemotherapeutically relevant compounds that inhibit PTK activity.

As shown in Figure 1, we recently combined this yeast tribrid system with a fluorescent reporter gene to discover proteins with PTK activity by screening a human cDNA library. This approach was designed as an alternative to conventional methods for screening cDNA libraries with yeast genetic systems, which can be highly time-consuming pursuits involving the transformation of the cDNA library, growth for several days to generate colonies, combination and redistribution of colonies, and analysis of cDNA protein products for the desired activity. We envisioned that fluorescence activated cell sorting (FACS) of yeast expressing a fluorescent reporter gene might be used to streamline cDNA library screening. Flow cytometry-based techniques such as FACS were proposed to allow quantification of individual yeast cell characteristics based on fluorescence detection. The ability to evaluate single cells could potentially streamline screening of cDNA libraries.

We hypothesized that a fluorescent reporter gene could be used with a "One-Tube" method to circumvent traditional yeast transformation, plating, and harvesting steps to simplify cDNA screening. As shown in Figure 2, this method involved transformation of yeast with the genetic system and cDNA library of interest, selection of desired transformants in liquid culture, induction of protein expression to trigger fluorescent reporter gene expression in the presence of appropriate protein-protein interactions, and FACS to isolate the most fluorescent yeast cells. After

growth of sorted yeast cells, the gene of interest can be identified by sequencing. To accomplish this objective, yeast optimized green fluorescent protein¹⁰ (yEGFP) was incorporated into the yeast reporter plasmid pSH18-34.¹¹ This new reporter plasmid was validated as shown in Figure 3. The yEGFP reporter was found to provide excellent signal-to-noise ratios by flow cytometry was incorporated into a yeast tribrid system to identify PTKs from a cDNA library. Using our one-tube method for screening a human cDNA library isolated from lymphocytes, the lymphocyte-specific PTK Fyn was identified, thus validating the utility of this approach. These results have been accepted for publication in the journal ChemBioChem.¹²

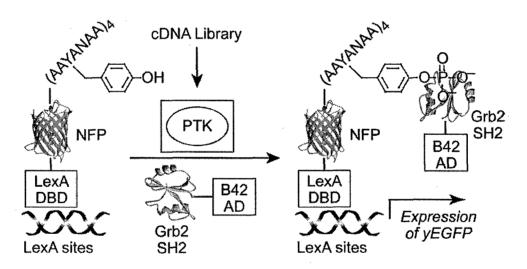
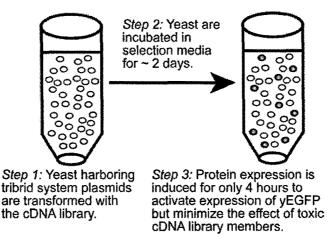
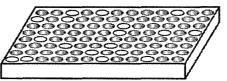


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the yeast tribrid system employed in these studies. This assay reports PTK activity by expression of the fluorescent yEGFP protein. NFP: Nonfluorescent protein. (AAYANAA) $_4$: Tetrameric PTK substrate.



Step 4: Fluorescent yeast are deposited onto solid non-inducing selection media by FACS. Colonies appear after ~ 3 days. Grey wells reflect green fluorescence after subsequent growth in liquid culture under inducing conditions.



Step 5: Yeast are replica plated onto solid media containing 5-FOA to remove the gene encoding B42-SH2. The requirement of this gene for cellular fluorescence, as analyzed by flow cytometry after growth in liquid culture, is represented by +.



Figure 2. "One-tube" protocol for screening cDNA libraries against a yeast tribrid system to identify protein tyrosine kinases.

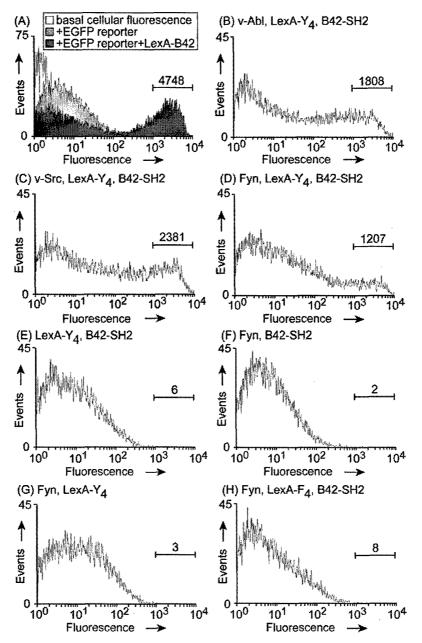


Figure 3. Analysis of yeast transformed with a fluorescent reporter gene by flow cytometry. The gate shown quantified the number of cells out of 15,000 in the fourth (top) decade of fluorescence. Panel A: Validation of the fluorescent reporter gene. The basal fluorescence of yeast lacking the reporter gene is colored white. The background fluorescence contributed by the yEGFP reporter alone is light gray, and the maximal fluorescence activated by a B42-LexA fusion protein is dark gray. Panels B-D: Expression of the yEGFP reporter gene in yeast tribrid systems. Positive controls: v-Abl (237-630) (Panel B), v-Src (137-526) (Panel C) and Fyn kinase (Panel D). Panels E-H: Fyn kinase omission control experiments. LexA-Y4 represents the tetrameric tyrosine-containing universal substrate. LexA-F4 represents a tetrameric phenylalanine-containing control sequence.

The research supported by this fellowship is currently focused on the development of a method to covalently modify and subsequently track proteins involved in breast cancer proliferation. We are studying covalent biotinylation mediated by the biotin protein ligase BirA as an approach to transfer molecules of interest to short 15-amino acid avitag peptide substrates. When this avitag peptide is fused to proteins such as the estrogen receptor, the BirA enzyme can biotinylate a conserved lysine residue within the avitag peptide and provide a handle for tracking this protein. To exend this approach to fluorescent labeling of proteins involved in breast cancer proliferation, we are working to chemically link biotin derivatives to fluorophores that enable modification of these proteins in living cells. This research may provide an important new approach for the fluorescent labeling of proteins involved in breast cancer proliferation.

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Key Research Accomplishments

- Created a yeast tribrid system for the detection and analysis of protein tyrosine kinase activity.
- Created of an ERG6-knockout strain of yeast useful for the identification of small molecules that modulate protein tyrosine kinases expressed in yeast.
- Developed and validated of a fluorescent reporter gene functional in yeast
- Developed a "One-Tube" protocol for the transformation and evaluation of cDNA libraries in PTK yeast tribrid systems
- Validated the utility of the one-tube protocol combined with the fluorescent reporter gene by cloning the PTK Fyn from a human cDNA library.

Reportable Outcomes

Manuscripts Published:

Clark, D. D. and Peterson, B. R. "Fluorescence-Based Cloning of a Protein Tyrosine Kinase with a Yeast Tribrid System" ChemBioChem, 2005, Accepted for publication

Clark, D. D. and Peterson, B. R. "Analysis of Protein Tyrosine Kinase Inhibitors in Recombinant Yeast Lacking the *ERG6* Gene" ChemBioChem 2003, 4, 101-107.

Clark, D. D. and Peterson, B. R. "Rapid Detection of Protein Tyrosine Kinase Activity in Recombinant Yeast Expressing a Universal Substrate"

J. Proteome Res. 2002, 1, 207-209.